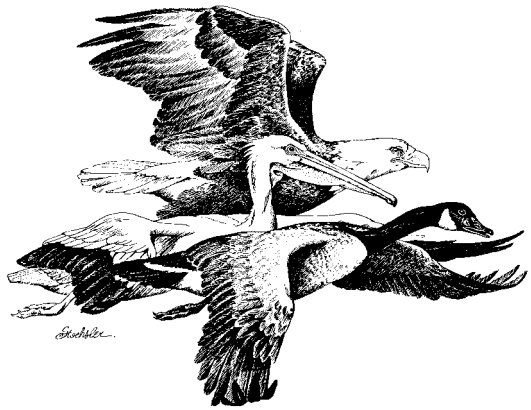
Words from the Wetlands



News from The Klamath Basin NWR's Winter 2000/ 2001

New Wetlands Planned for Tule Lake NWR

By Fran Maiss
Deputy Refuge Manager

Over the past six years the Klamath Basin Refuge in cooperation with the Universities of Washington and California have studied the affects of alternating wetlands and farmlands on both wildlife species and agricultural pests. As part of this work, four pilot research sites totaling 640 acres were constructed. Research on two of these sites (Hovey Point and Headquarters Marsh) focused on wetland habitat and wildlife response to restoration of croplands. The other two sites (Fries Island and Lot 5) were studied to determine the impacts of wetland-cropland rotation on agricultural operations. Proven benefits to both agriculture and wildlife have occurred. Restored wetland habitats are immediately productive, producing good stands of wetland plants in the first growing season. These sites support disproportionately dense waterfowl populations relative to their size. When several of these wetland sites were returned to crop production it was discovered that several soil pests and diseases had been eliminated. Local growers reported very high yields with no need for soil fumigants. Overall, this program promises to reduce pesticide use on the refuge as well as greatly enhance the productivity of refuge habitats.

Last winter, the refuge in cooperation with the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) and Tulelake Irrigation District (TID) placed lots 1 through 4 along "A" dike in a one year flooding regime to enhance wetland habitats and eliminate crop pests. Payment for the water ($37/acre) to TID is being provided by BOR. These wetlands are already supporting dense stands of cattail and bulrush and produced some duck broods last spring. This wetland habitat remained flooded through December and will then be drained off and placed back in the cropland leasing program. This winter we are planning on doing the same one year flooding regime to lots 34 and 35 in the Northeast corner of the League of Nations and lots 1B and 2 in the Panhandle area. These flooded units will be open to hunting with the same regulations as in the past.

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New Wetlands Planned for Tule Lake NWR

By Fran Maiss
Deputy Refuge Manager

Ultimately, the refuge would like to see some of these newly created wetlands remain for longer than one year. This past month an unexpected opportunity arose to do just that. The BOR office in Sacramento had some money targeted for wetland development in the Sacramento Valley become available for wetland restoration in our area if we had an immediately available project. Therefore, the refuge met with representatives of BOR, TID and Ducks Unlimited to see if we could do a larger cropland/wetland project for a multiple year period. What was ultimately agreed upon was that lots 57 through 62 in the Frog Pond (spaced blinds D-1 through D-4 plus the five farm lots in the closed area below the D space blinds) would be placed in a four year wetland status, with the refuge placing an equal amount of its cooperatively farmed lands in the commercial leasing program.

These lots were selected for multiple reasons: a large size contiguous block (568 acres); the five year lease period expires on all of them this October; they are surrounded on the north, east and west by adequate levees; they are relatively flat, with only three feet of fall throughout, and they all suffer from soil pests and diseases. This project will involve constructing 0.5 miles of 3 foot high levee with a 14 foot top width and 5:1 slopes on the south side of lot 62, along with one cross levee of the same dimensions between lots 67 and 68.. Construction was started in December 2000 and is now complete.

The D blinds 1 - 4 will remain in spaced blind hunting area, with the inclusion of pit blinds, once wetlands are established. California-Oregon Wetlands and Waterfowl Council, a local sportsmen group is researching different blind models and will make a recommendation to the refuge. Hunt fee monies will be used to purchase the blinds and make the annual water payment to TID. The development of this area with multiple partners should provide quality hunting in the D blinds and in fact should improve hunting throughout the adjacent C and E spaced blinds of the Tule Lake Refuge.

Dates to Remember

*** February 16 - 18 -- Bald Eagle Conference in Klamath Falls**

*** March 2 - 4 – Visit the refuge booth at the Medford Sportsman's Show**

*** March 3 – Post Season Hunter Meeting at the Tule Lake Fairgrounds 2:00 to 6:00 p.m.**

*** May 12 – International Migratory Bird Day**
Check local newspapers for events scheduled in Alturas and Klamath Falls

2000 FIRE SEASON

By David Goheen
Prescribed Burn Specialist

The 2000 fire season has been a busy year for the Klamath Basin Refuge fire management group. Prescribed fire projects were completed during the winter and early spring. Approximately 900 acres were burned by the crew during this period. Wet conditions prevented the crew from completing several planned burns. Many of the completed burns were burns associated with maintenance and water delivery projects. Burning was also used to facilitate clean-up of old wood scattered around the recently acquired Orem-Sterns properties.

In addition to on-refuge burns, fire personnel participated in burn projects in other parts of the country. Gregg Zoppetti and Troy Portnoff both travelled to the National Interagency Prescribed Fire Program Training Center in Tallahassee, Florida in January. They spent three weeks participating in multiple prescribed fires throughout the southeast. Greg Hagedorn attended the Southwest Fire Training Academy in Albuquerque, where he participated in several burns. Several crew members also helped on several burns on the Hart Mountain Refuge, and Mike Glass traveled to Buenos Aires Refuge in Arizona to assist.

The seasonal fire crew arrived on June 5, and worked until the end of September. Engine 84, which is stationed at Tulelake was staffed with Amanda Hickman, Gretchen Schurwanz, Ross Wise and Gregg Zoppetti. Engine 82, which is stationed at the Klamath Marsh National Wildlife Refuge, was staffed with Chris Curry, Jesse Irwin and Troy Portnoff. This was the first year of working for the Fish and Wildlife Service for Amanda, Gretchen, Ross and Jesse. Ross was the only seasonal employee with previous fire experience. The first week of work for the seasonal employees consisted of orientation and basic firefighting skills. Engine 82 left immediately after orientation for a 14 day fire detail in New Mexico. The rest of the seasonals attended basic firefighting guard school to become qualified as firefighters.

Fire starts were low in the local area. Engine 82 responded to 3 fires locally and Engine 84 responded to 5 fires. However fire activity was at historic high level in other parts of the west. Engine 82 was sent to Utah to assist on the Old Royd Complex, and also to Idaho for the Burgdorf Fire. Crewmembers from Engine 84 were sent to Idaho on a hand crew assignment to support initial attack on a number of small fires. Part of the crew also assisted on fires on and near the Columbia National Wildlife Refuge in Washington, and also on a helicopter detail to Vale, Oregon.

Fire employees also participated in supervisory and logistical support positions on various fires around the nation. Dave Sinclair served as the Deputy Incident Commander on the Oregon/California(ORCA) Incident Management Team. Dave served on incidents at the Grand Canyon, the Lakeview Bureau of Land Management District, and the Klamath National Forest. Mike Glass served on fire assignments to Arizona and San Diego. Dave Goheen served as an Incident Commander and Division Supervisor on a fire on the Elko Bureau of Land Management District. Glass and Goheen also assisted with the Geological Multi Agency Coordinating (GEOMAC) fire mapping project at the Denver United States Geological (USGS) office.

Prescribed burning of Unit 13 of Lower Klamath Refuge

Lower Klamath refuge experienced a rare lightning fire on September 16. The Geezopeat Fire burned 5 acres and required extensive mop-up in peat soils. Another fire, the Volunteer Fire which burned 144 acres on September 28, also required extensive mop-up.

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Species Spotlight

RARE WHOOPER SWAN RETURNS TO KLAMATH BASIN REFUGES

By Joan Van Matre
Refuge Volunteer

After a few year's absence, a whooper swan has once again been observed on the White Lake unit of Lower Klamath Refuge. A whooper swan was seen in this location during several past winters (1991 through 1994) as well as January and March of 1998. A whooper swan (possibly the same one) has also been observed several years in the Summer Lake in Oregon. This year the whooper swan was first sighted in November and on numerous occasions in December. **As recently as January 10, 2001 the whooper was sighted with 3 young swans (cygnets) which also appear to be whooper swans (see photo below).**

Adult whooper swans are noticeably larger than tundra swans (with which they have been seen in the Klamath Basin) and they have a large bright yellow patch at the base of the bill. The yellow is more extensive than is seen on the Bewick's swan and usually terminates in a fairly sharp point on the lower edge of the upper mandible. Both adult and immature whooper swans have a straight forehead profile. Immature whooper swans have ash-brown plumage and whitish coloration on the bill where the adults have the prominent yellow patch.

Whooper swans are a Eurasian species which breed from Iceland eastward across northern Europe and Asia. Most of the eastern population migrates to the Japanese Island of Honshu in the winter, but a small number have been reported to cross the Bering Straits to winter on the Aleutian Islands. A few cases of whooper swans nesting in Alaska have been reported.

Whooper swans are reported to live up to 35 years and mate for life. The normal clutch size is 5-6 eggs. Incubation by the female lasts 35 to 40 days. Both adults care for the young. Cygnets are able to fly 8 to 9 weeks after hatching. These facts and other information about the life history of whooper swans may be found in The Audubon Encyclopedia of North American Birds and Wildfowl of the World by Soothill and Whitehead.

Review of the 2000 Waterfowl Hunting Season

By Dave Menke
Outdoor Recreation Planner

This past hunting season on Lower Klamath and Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuges started out on an ominous note when the Bureau of Reclamation announced a cut off all water deliveries to the refuges on August 31, 2000. The timing of this action couldn't have been worse as the refuges normally begin flooding seasonal wetlands on Lower Klamath Refuges starting September 1st. If no water deliveries had been made, about two-third of Lower Klamath wetlands would have been dry during the critical fall migration period. Eventually, delayed water deliveries provided floodup of critical wetlands both inside and outside of the hunting areas about one month behind schedule. Due to much reduced wetlands on Lower Klamath, a limitation on hunter numbers was imposed on the refuge for the first three weeks of the waterfowl hunting season. The following paragraphs provide some general comparisons of hunter numbers and hunting success on the two refuges compared to recent seasons.

Opening day averages were fairly similar to recent years for marsh hunters and showed some improvement for field goose hunters. Lower Klamath marsh hunters took an average of 4.94 ducks per hunter compared to 4.89 and 4.77 ducks per hunter the previous two years. Tule Lake Marsh hunters had lower success on opening day averaging 3.35 ducks per hunter compared to duck averages of 4.18 and 5.28 the previous two season opening days. Spaced blind goose hunters averaged 0.82 geese per hunter compared to 0.52 and 0.65 the previous two years. League-of-Nations hunters averaged 1.08 goos per hunter opening day compared to 0.11 and 1.55 the two previous opening days. Lower Klamath field hunters had a 1.35 opening day goose average compare to 0.38 and 0.81 opening day goose averages the previous two openers.

Overall hunting use on Tule Lake Refuge was down roughly 18 percent compared to last year. Most of this resulted from fewer hunters on Tule Marsh compared to past years. Goose hunting success was up in both the spaced-blinds and League of Nations compared to the past two years. Duck hunting was much higher in the spaced blinds than in recent years. For the period October through December, hunter numbers on Tule marsh decreased over 40 percent and the per hunter duck average went down from 3.0 ducks per hunter in 1999 to 2.5 ducks per hunter for the 2000 season.

Hunter use on Lower Klamath hunting units decreased about 32 percent compared to last season for the October through December period. Although some of the decrease can be attributed to the limited numbers of hunters permitted on the refuge in October, November use was also down compared to last year. The duck per hunter average for Lower Klamath marsh hunters was up slightly this season (from 2.97 in 1999 to 3.16 in 2000). The goose average for Lower Klamath field hunters was 0.41 goose per hunter this season compared to 0.23 and 0.49 for the same periods in the 1999 and 1998 seasons respectively.

Fire cont'd from page 3

Prescribed fire and hazard reduction projects continued into this fall. The crew of Engine 82 initiated a hazard reduction project around the refuge headquarters at the Klamath Marsh. Considering that this crew was gone much of the summer, they were able to accomplish a great amount of work on this project, which will ultimately greatly reduce the fire hazard on the compound. Another large project was the completion of fireline in the Bear Valley Refuge. The Turnbull Regional Prescribed Fire Crew, greatly assisted in getting most of the fireline completed. 2,500 acres of habitat management burning has been accomplished thus far on the Lower Klamath Refuge this fall. Another 45 acres of understory burning was accomplished in the Bear Valley Refuge.

The year 2000 has proved to be a busy and challenging year. Even though we had a fairly green crew, things could not have worked out any better. It was a successful fire season with everyone pitching in to work together. Everyone experienced quite a bit of wildfire and participated in prescribed fire. Project work was done in an effective and timely manner, and safety was not compromised. One of the most satisfying parts of working on the fire crew, is that you get to work with all the other divisions and people on the refuge. Along with wildland fire suppression, prescribed fire and fire equipment maintenance, the crew worked with biologists on eagle monitoring, fence work and sucker stations. We helped the maintenance division with mowing, cleanup on the Orem property, office construction and bridge work.

A Volunteer Perspective
By Hank Smith
Refuge Volunteer

This year of volunteering at the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuge has not only been a lot of fun, but productive as well. Some of the projects which I have completed include building 4, four-person blinds for disabled hunters, helping in picking up dead and dying waterfowl during the botulism outbreak, assisting in the banding of over 650 ducks during night operations, becoming qualified as an airboat operator and ATV driver, replacing and repairing defective refuge signs, and insuring compliance with Refuge rules and regulations by being another set of ears and eyes and in conducting hunter "bag checks".

In fact, it was while conducting one of these checks that we discovered a hunter had not returned from the marsh to his car at the normal exit time. Officer Menke and I immediately began covering the marsh area in my Jon boat.

After searching a major portion without any contact, it was decided we needed aircraft resources to locate the missing hunter. Darkness was fast approaching. During the shutdown of the boat engine and radio call, we heard 3 faint gun blasts coming from deep within the very heavy tules. We motored toward the sound of the blasts, shutdown the engine and yelled. The hunters were indeed lost but not in any medical emergency. Shortly after, we were able to lead them safely back to the boat ramp. They had adequate clothing for that particular day, but it was uncertain as to how they would have managed all night, because that night the temperatures dropped to 19 degrees.

Conducting the bag checks led to the discovery of some important information:

1) the need for a training program to improve hunters' ability to properly identify the different species of waterfowl (and thus avoid a violation of regulations); 2) a list of recommendations to enhance the quality of individual hunting experiences and minimize disagreements among hunters; 3) ideas for improving rescue operations and procedures and safety for those using the Refuge; 4) last, but most important, that we have a truly remarkable team of bright, talented and committed professionals who are working very hard to insure that our wildlife heritage is not only preserved but that this refuge will come to be a model for all others to emulate.

This Refuge is clearly in good hands. If you enjoy being on a hard working team which will engage you with projects that are not only dearly needed but bring about a high degree of personal satisfaction, then you might want to consider giving them a call at 530-667-2231. Ask for the volunteer coordinator and tell him Hank Smith sent you.

Volunteers Needed !!!

If you would like to follow Hank's advice !!!

Contact us on how you can become part of the team.

We especially, need volunteers to help with our Visitor Center operations . Also, you can find out about other volunteer opportunities as Hank described or opportunities to work with the Biologist planting tree seedlings in the spring.

So, if you would like to be come part of a great team of Volunteers and Employees, meet new and interesting people and have an all around good time. **Then Don't Wait !!!!**

Contact: Park Rangers David Champine or Jerry Ann King at (530) 667– 2231

Curlew Sandpiper Seen on Tule Lake

By Ray Ekstrom

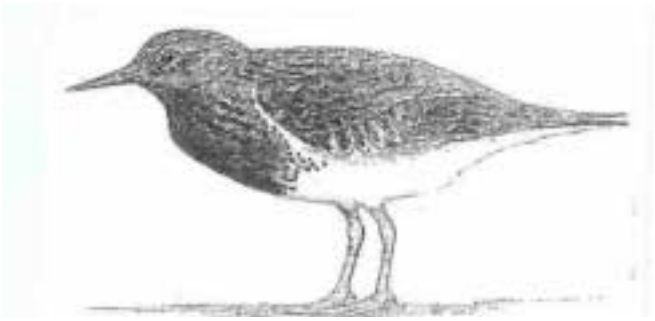
Small basins of water were all that remained as Tule Lake's "Sump 1(B) Wetlands Enhancement Project" moved through its first dry cycle. By mid-August, the overwhelming Wilson's Phalarope numbers that had cluttered the shores and mudflats had moved on, leaving one with a better opportunity to search through the medium-sized shorebirds for rarities. On August 18, at approximately 10:30 A.M., my attention settled on a resting bird with its bill buried in its back feathers. Its legs were mostly submerged and, with its back to the sun, I was left almost clueless as to its identity. After scanning the surrounding area, I returned to the mystery bird, finding that it had become active. My attention was suddenly riveted on a long, down curved bill. The bird was about equal to a Dunlin in size but I could now see the rusty breast and this alone eliminated that possibility. I stared in disbelief. I could think of only one possibility and that was Curlew Sandpiper! The bird was only about 50 yards from me and I could see a well defined, whitish supercilium before the bird flew a short distance and started foraging. It was not long before a raptor put up all of the areas's shorebirds and my newly discovered rarity was up there somewhere, circling with the thousands of specks in the sky. By this time I had gotten a glimpse of the white rump. What followed was a long, 1 to 2 hour search for the sandpiper. Finally it was relocated but the bird was now on the opposite side of the water from me and too distant. I left the area, wanting confirmation from a second party.

After a lapse of about 2 hours I returned from the town of Tulelake, with local birder, Kevin Spencer. It took us a while but we relocated the bird, now much closer than when I last saw it. Kevin was equally amazed at what we were witnessing. We noted that it foraged by walking and pecking in the same manner as the small sandpipers, the company of which it seemed to prefer. The wings extended beyond the tail and were whitish on undersides. It was flushed several times and we became quite proficient at relocating it, but then there was nothing out there that even remotely resembled it. The rusty breast appeared to be somewhat faded, suggesting that it might be an adult female.

Second Sighting of Black Turnstone for Siskiyou County

By Ray Ekstrom

It was a cloudy, rainy, late summer morning at Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge on September 1, 2000. Sump 1-B had been drained during the period from May to September and offered shorebird habitat in an area where next to none existed for decades. At about 10:30 A.M., I observed one Black Turnstone at the northwest corner of Sump 1-B. I watched and documented for over an hour. Notations on plumage included sketches depicting the very dark brownish-gray head, breast, back and wings. The crown, back and breast were pin striped with dark, blackish lines. An inconspicuous supercillium displayed faint, dark, diagonal lines. Scapular and wing covert feathers had edges that were paler than the base. The belly sides, anal region and under tail coverts were pure white. The median coverts closest to the bend of the wing were boldly edged with white and only partially concealed the whitish area beneath. In flight, a rather plain plumage explodes into a striking, eye-catching black and white pattern. The legs were a dark, pinkish-gray. The flight call is a rapid staccato, slightly descending tr-r-r-r-r-r-r-r.



The bird eventually flew to the northwest and appeared to be following the English Channel. I departed but returned at about 2:15 P.M. only to find <u>two</u> Black Turnstones on the same mudflat where the morning bird had been foraging. One turnstone resembled the 10:30 bird in having a short, conspicuous white strip on the scapulars as depicted in the photograph, a mark lacking on the second bird. Photographs were taken at this time. I am assuming that these birds were travelling together and only briefly separated on this morning, thus eliminating a tug-of-war with my conscience over the claiming of two separate records.

This is only the second known record for Siskiyou County.